

# BRITTANY - LOWER NORMANDY - LOIRE REGION OVERVIEW



The APP Rennes' district includes the following regions: Brittany, Lower Normandy, and The Loire Region (Pays de la Loire).

## **A. Brittany**

The region of Brittany is composed of four counties: Ille-et-Vilaine, Côtes d'Armor, Finistère and Morbihan.

### **Demographics**

Brittany is the seventh most populous region of France with 2.9 million inhabitants.

Rennes, the capital of Brittany, has a population of 212,000 inhabitants, making it the 10<sup>th</sup> largest city in France. Including the metropolitan region, the population is 362,000.

Rennes comes in at or near the top of all quality of life polls in France, due to its combination of an attractive city center, parts of which date back to Medieval times, a vibrant population that includes 60,000 students, a strong overall economy and the natural beauty of the Brittany region that surrounds the city.

### **Celtic history**

The Brittany region has a strong Celtic heritage that is experiencing resurgence today in the form of Breton cultural development, periodically intermingled with political separatism. The Breton language is already taught in a series of special schools, the Diwan bilingual. Celtic music is pervasive in the region, and the Celtic Festival in Lorient, on the southern coast of Brittany, grows in stature and popularity each year. TV Breizh, a regional cable and satellite channel, dedicated to the promotion of Celtic Breton heritage, just came into being in September 2000.

### **Economy**

Brittany accounts for 4% of the French national GDP and 3.1% of French exports. Key industrial sectors in Rennes and in Brittany more largely are telecommunication research, with 40% of French telecomm research centered in Rennes, Brest and Lannion. The Rennes Atalante Science Park, created in 1984, is the center of new technology development in Rennes. The area is well served by regional highway networks and the TGV high-speed train.

Agriculture, fishing and food industry, are the other major economic sectors. Brittany is the first region in France for agricultural production and for fishing, and accounts for 8% of France's added agricultural value and 46% of national fishing production.

### **Culture**

Rennes is proud of its cultural life. In addition to an active season of classical concerts and plays, (Orchestre de Bretagne and Théâtre National de Bretagne) the city holds numerous annual festivals geared to the younger student population, including Transmusicales, Les Tombées de la Nuit, Jazz à l'Ouest and Travelling, a film festival.

The Franco-American Institute in Rennes, a binational cultural center opened in 1961 by the US Embassy in Paris and Rennes city hall, offers a broad range of cultural activities, such as art exhibitions, concerts, conferences, a student exchange program, American English courses, translation services and an American library.

Rennes has broken ground for a new cultural center, the “Champs Libres”, with opening scheduled for 2004.

### **Brittany and the United States**

One of the most important points of emigration from France to the U.S. was a small village in Brittany called Gourin. Between the 1860s and the 1950s, thousands of people from this one town and the surrounding area emigrated to America. Every resident of Gourin can now count at least one American relative.

The city of Rennes was liberated on August 4, 1944, by the troops of General Patton. The citizens of Rennes turned out in force on City Hall Plaza to join the arriving American soldiers and celebrate their liberty. The same site was chosen by the city of Rennes for the official memorial service on September 14, conducted jointly with APP Rennes, in commemoration of the tragic events of September 11.

The city of Rennes has been Sister City with Rochester, New York, since 1947. Moreover, the cities of Brest and Vitre are respectively Sister Cities with Denver - CO, and Greece, New York.

### **B. Lower Normandy**

The region of Lower Normandy is composed of three counties: Calvados, Manche and Orne.

#### **Demographics**

In the 1999 census, Lower Normandy ranked the 17<sup>th</sup> most populous province with 1.4 million people. The capital of Lower Normandy is Caen, with a population of 117,000. With the metropolitan area, the population reaches 200,000.

#### **Economy**

The region produces 1.3% of all exports from France, and consumes 1.2% of all import to France. 4.5% of all produces exported from the region in 2000 came to the United States. Lower Normandy has globally a higher than national average rate as the working agricultural population is 10%. With 24% of workers working in the secondary sector, Lower Normandy is at the same level as the national average. Three sectors dominate the market: the car industry, chemicals and petrol, and the food industry. Many other areas participate in the industrial activity of the region particularly the electrical construction and electronics, aeronautic and naval construction, the iron and steel industry, textile industry and paper industry. **Caen is the 1<sup>st</sup> port of Lower Normandy.**

## **History**

In June 6<sup>th</sup> 1944, allied forces landed on the coasts of Calvados and Manche. The American beaches (Omaha Beach, Utah Beach) were names given in the war and have remained, the original ones never to be reverted to. Arromanches with its artificial port, military cemeteries, la Pointe du Hoc, monuments, milestones and military relics continue to serve as reminders of the battles. At the American cemetery in Colleville sur Mer, which covers twenty eight acres, rest more than 4,000 American people, deceased in the Normandy and Brittany campaigns in 1944.

## **Lower Normandy and the United States**

Lower Normandy has always had close relations with the United States, and even tighter since the end of the Second World War. The region hosts many American citizens, particularly in Caen area. The city of Caen is sister city with Nashville - TN and Alexandria - VA. Many associations attest a steadfast commitment in preserving the Franco-American friendship; amongst them are the sister city Committees of Caen-Nashville and Caen Alexandria, Les Fleurs de la Mémoire, and France Etats-Unis Caen.

## **C. Loire Region**

The Loire Region is composed of five counties: Loire-Atlantique, Vendée, Mayenne, Maine-et-Loire and Sarthe.

## **Demographics**

The region, and especially the department of Loire Atlantique, has grown dramatically in recent years. The population reached more than 3.1 million in 1999 in the Loire Region, and around 800,000 for the Nantes/Saint Nazaire metropolis. Nantes comes in at or near the top of all quality of life polls in France.

## **Economy**

Pays de la Loire is joined with Brittany and Poitou-Charentes through an active economic development association called Ouest Atlantique. The three regions have worked together economically for twenty years through this organization. Nantes, the capital of the Pays de la Loire, has the largest economy among the cities of the western regions of France. Angers, the capital of Maine-et-Loire, is after Nantes the largest business center in the region, with a sizable U.S. business presence.

## **Culture**

The region has developed a very intense cultural life and holds many festivals, such as Europa Jazz festival in Le Mans, Les Accroche-Coeurs in Angers, or Les Folles Journées and Les Rendez-Vous de l'Erdre in Nantes. The capital city has an active theater season, a wonderful Musée des Beaux-Arts, and the Orchestre National des Pays de la Loire, founded in 1971. The Musée du Château des Ducs de Bretagne, housed in the

original chateau which dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, contains two museums, both focused on the history of Nantes.

### **Pays de la Loire and the United States**

The city of Nantes has two sister city relationships in the U.S. The relationship with Jacksonville - FL, dates from 1985. The pairing with Seattle - WA, dates from 1980.

In this region, many associations attest a steadfast commitment in preserving the Franco-American friendship; amongst them, are

- France Etats-Unis Nantes,
- France Etats-Unis Angers,
- The American Library in Angers.